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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Reports provided by specialized agencies of the United Nations on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

1. On behalf of the Committee, the Secretariat invited the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on 29 October 1998, to submit to the Committee by 5 December 1998 a report on information provided by States to FAO on the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which would supplement the information contained in the reports of the States parties to the Convention that will be considered at the twentieth session. Annexed to the present note are country briefs prepared by FAO on Algeria and China.

2. Other information sought by the Committee refers to activities, programmes and policy decisions undertaken by FAO to promote the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention.

3. The report annexed hereto has been submitted in compliance with the Committee's requests.

* CEDAW/C/1999/I/1.

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Annex

Country briefs of States parties prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for consideration at the twentieth session of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

ALGERIA

Agriculture

In 1995 the agricultural sector produced 9.6 percent of the GDP. In the same year, 15 percent of the volume of the total imports were food products, of which 52 percent were basic food stuff, such as cereals. The country's dependence on food imports may increase further despite the agricultural potential of the country.

The Government has addressed this issue by elaborating a development strategy for the agricultural sector, aimed at achieving sustainable development and food security, which also takes into account the social dimension of the population.

Women in Agriculture

Women comprise 50 percent of the rural population which, in 1987, was approximately 49.2 percent of the total population.

Women play an important role in the economic and social development of the country. They contribute to the production of local artisan products (carpets, pottery, etc.) and they are actively involved in agricultural activities, especially in the mountainous regions (Chenour, Kabylie, Jijel, Aures).

The extent to which women participate in food production and food security is severely underestimated, mainly because of the scarcity of accurate and up-to-date disaggregated data and statistics, especially at the household level.

Women contribute to household food security in three basic ways:

- women provide a substantial amount of labour required on farm to produce food;
- women are almost universally responsible for the preparation of food;
- women use a high percentage of their income to buy food from wages they earn off the farm in agricultural and non-agricultural jobs.

Women in decision-making

Gender gaps exist with respect to women's access to power and resources necessary to achieve food security (political representation, education, technology, credit, research, extension services, etc.).

Algerian women lag far behind their counterparts in the rest of the world in their economic and social participation and decision-making, in spite of substantial improvements in institutional support since the early 1980s.

Women's access to productive resources

Legal, social and institutional barriers are responsible for the great inequalities in women's access to productive resources such as land, credit technology and education.

Land. Women rarely own arable land, although civil law permits ownership and the buying and selling of land by women[1]. Without the ability to exercise their right to land ownership, women lack collateral and are thus denied access to other resources such as credit and technology.

Credit. Rural women have very little opportunity to access credit, which is important for them in order to increase agricultural production. Some of the major impediments to women's access to credit are illiteracy, lack of information, tradition and custom, and, as above mentioned, the absence of collateral, especially in the form of land ownership.

Technology. Women perform their work with very little access to labour-saving equipment and technology, which increase the efficiency of farm and household work, improve agricultural yields and increase food production. Women's access to technology is limited by several factors including their lack of credit to purchase technology. Tradition encourages men to take control over mechanised land preparation, leaving women with the more labour intensive and time-consuming tasks such as hand-picking, hand-weeding and harvesting.

Policy planning

The significant contributions of women farmers are seldom taken into account. Planners and policy-makers rely almost exclusively on the official statistics which do not count for women's labour. A common shortcoming of microstatistics is the undercounting of women's extensive participation in production, in both agriculture and income-generating activities within the informal sectors. The lack of gender disaggregated data does not allow an evaluation of women's economic contribution and facilitates planners to exclude women farmers from policies and support programmes.

Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women

The Government of Algeria has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

A Committee for the Advancement of Women has been created within the Ministry of Social and Family Affairs. The Committee is composed of various experts on issues relating to the status of women. However, the concept of rural women and issues relating to the agricultural sector are absent in the work of the Committee.

Women's organizations, and in particular rural women's organizations, are increasing in number. The rural organizations focus on literacy and health, and provide support to rural women's activities

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, within its five-year strategy framework for development, has undertaken measures to support the advancement of rural women. These measures are in accordance with the recommendations relating to rural women produced by the National Consultative Committee on Agriculture, and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. They aim to promote the social and economic status of rural women and their full integration in the development process.

[1] FAO. Rural women and food security: current situation and perspectives (1998).

FAO has developed a Regional Plan of Action for the Near East Region (1996-2000) with the aim to stimulate growth with equity in relation to agricultural and rural development in the Near East. In Algeria, FAO is also implementing a development programme aimed at the integration of rural women in development through the elaboration of an intervention strategy to ameliorate the economic situation of rural women and their families.

Recommendations

- Statistical information on the specific social and economic characteristics of rural women in their various situations is needed in order to develop strategic goals and objectives, and to design projects to benefit rural women.
- Research should be carried out on women's contribution to the national economy; the role of indigenous women in the management of the natural resources and the environment; the various aspects of food processing and marketing; the gender division of labour in productive and reproductive tasks; technology to improve women's productivity and incomes.
- Gender sensitisation and training should be carried out among decision and policy makers in economics, agriculture and the social fields.
- More women in decision-making positions are needed together with gender sensitisation training to be made available to planners, policy-makers and researchers in agricultural issues.
- There is also a need to establish a mechanism to implement prevailing legislation in regards to land rights and to ensure equal access to land titles for both women and men, and particularly for female headed-households.
- Women's access to credit and technology should be improved through facilitating women's participation in users groups and through the promotion of women's credit groups.

CHINA

Agriculture

China is still experiencing a period of transition from a central planning economy towards a market economy. During this time, the agricultural and rural sector of China has enjoyed a stable development also due to the favourable circumstances of economic reform provided by the Government.

Approximately fifteen years ago, the Government introduced a contract system for the use of farm-land, which not only liberated the rural labour force but also brought significant changes to the national economy and rural areas. Substantive measures have been taken to stabilise and improve the farm-land contract system throughout the country. In order to ensure that all farmers enjoy long-term land-use rights, the Government has been promoting the renewal of land contracts for farmers for a new thirty-year term as the previous fifteen-year term contracts expire[2].

To achieve the goal of eliminating poverty by the end of the century, the Government issued a policy of "Counterpart assistance for poverty alleviation and economic development", whereby the more advanced provinces, in economic terms, should provide the necessary development assistance to the poorer provinces[3].

Since 1978, when China's Government undertook a reform policy, the development gap between eastern China and central and western China has increased. East China with a favourable climate, a higher number of resources, better infrastructures and easier access to markets is richer. With the aim to narrow the gap, the Government has decided to provide more assistance to the central and western parts of China, through favourable policies, financial, scientific and technological support.

The Central Economic Working Conference, held in December 1997, elaborated guidelines for the country's economic development in 1998, which give priority to the continuous economic reform and further promotion of the agricultural sector as the foundation of the national economy.

Rural migration

China is experiencing a large scale temporary and permanent migration which is simultaneously both a spontaneous response to and consequence of economic reform and an integral component of government policy[4]. Migration is facilitated and encouraged by the Chinese Government on the grounds that it promotes 'more balanced development', the redistribution of surplus labour, the promotion of efficient, sustainable and modern

[2] FAO. China Annual Report (1997).
[3] Ibid.
[4] FAO. Rural migration in rural development in the evolving market economy (1997).

agricultural development and rapid wealth creation to the benefit of all categories of the rural population and especially those in the poorer regions.

Male labourers account for the majority of the migrating population from rural areas. The proportion of female migrants declined from 55.8 percent in 1987 to 45.3 percent in 1990 (China Census, 1990). One of the reasons for reversed gender dominance can be attributed to the flourishing of China's economy during the late 1980s. During this period, the proportion of male migrants seeking better economic opportunities in urban areas increased relatively faster compared with other patterns of rural mobility. Moreover, the proportion of the female-dominated movement, such as family reunion and marriage oriented migration, decreased during the same period[5].

Witin China, the proportion of women in the migrating population in developed regions is larger than that in less developed regions.

Role of women in agriculture

In China, women play a vital role in the production, preparation, preservation and distribution of food supplies. Indeed, women comprise up to 74 percent[6] of the agricultural labour force, depending on the region. However, past development plans and extension services have focused on men and their farm production needs.

A direct consequence of the male out-migration outlined above, is the growing phenomenon of the "feminization of agriculture". In addition, the female proportion of migrants are usually young and unmarried, leading to the "greying of farming"[7], where older women, become the principal farmers. The women left behind are expected to take sole responsibility for agricultural production and housework. These combined demands on their labour often leave them tired and exhausted. Where older women are left to undertake agricultural activities, they are rarely able to maintain previous levels of cultivation. Furthermore, the declining importance of agriculture and the comparatively low status of women have meant that the feminization of agriculture has led to a mutual and further downgrading of the status of women and the status of agriculture.

Increased male migration caused by the expansion of the market economy and poverty conditions of rural households, has contributed to the emergence of female-headed households.

Women play a major role in the commodity production through specialised households. Over 50 percent of workers engaged in specialised activities are women, and they generate 55 to 65 percent of the total commodity output value.

Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women

As part of their progressive efforts towards economic transition, in 1978, the Chinese Government introduced the household contract system which improved the rural economy and expanded the diversified agricultural economy. The household contract system has changed

[5] Ibid.

[6] FAO. Rural women and food security: current situation and perspectives (1998).

[7] Ibid.

women's work patterns, allowing them to allocate their time between agricultural and household work.

The All-China Women's Federation is a national organization whose principal function is to guard the interests of women and children. It works in close collaboration with the Government utilizing the experience of professional women to help rural women.

The responsibility for coordination of the implementation of the Chinese programme (which is the Chinese version of the Beijing Platform for Action) lies with the National Working Committee for Children and Women under the State Council. A total of seventeen ministries and commissions and five NGOs are members of the Committee.

The UN system in China has created a Task Force for the follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to coordinate activities and identify needs for other follow-up support. FAO actively participates in the Task Force.

FAO has commissioned a study of rural migration within the context of rural development and the market economy. FAO has also undertaken a research on the situation of women in China's Northwest arid and semi-arid agriculture and a pilot database for women in agriculture to be used as a planning tool for interventions.

Access to agricultural resources

Land. While women may lack land ownership rights, they have access to land through the means of central allocation per caput[8]. Land is distributed by the state in relation to family size, thus, theoretically a larger household has access to more land, while both men and women can cultivate the land.

Extension services and training. Although women are crucial in agricultural development, particularly because male migration is increasing, their opportunities to access extension services market information and various training courses are limited. Women's opportunities to learn about new and improved technologies in agricultural production are constrained by:

- limited time - women are engaged in both farm activities and housework;
- women's lower level of education;
- extension services that target men, who are considered heads of the households and responsible for duties outside the private sphere.

Recommendations

- Development policies and planning need to take into consideration the roles, responsibilities and needs of women food producers.
- Gender-disaggregated agricultural statistical data is a critical pre-requisite to sensitise development policy-makers.
- Socio-economic and gender awareness and sensitisation training should be made available to planners, policy makers and researchers in agricultural issues, focusing on practical tools to rectify current gender biases in planning, policy making, agricultural research and extension delivery.

[8] Ibid.

- Agricultural extension programmes urgently need to re-orient their services to support the majority of the agricultural labour force: women farmers.
- Extension workers should be retrained to strengthen their skills to work with women farmers.